

Shelley Moore Capito

1953–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
REPUBLICAN FROM WEST VIRGINIA

2001–



Image courtesy of the Member

SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, DAUGHTER OF ONE OF West Virginia's most successful Republican politicians, made her own mark on state politics by running as a GOP candidate in a heavily Democratic district in 2000 and following her father into the U.S. House.

Shelley Moore was born in Glen Dale, West Virginia, on November 26, 1953, to Arch A. Moore, Jr., a Republican who served 12 years in the U.S. House of Representatives and another dozen as governor of West Virginia, and Shelley Riley Moore. Raised in West Virginia and Washington, D.C., she graduated with a B.S. in zoology from Duke University in 1975 and earned an M.Ed. from the University of Virginia in 1976. She married Charles Capito, Jr., and the couple raised three children: Charles, Moore, and Shelley. Shelley Moore Capito worked as a counselor at West Virginia State College and as the educational information center director for the West Virginia board of regents. In 1996, Capito was elected to the West Virginia house of delegates, where she served from 1997 to 2001. Her legislative career included service as minority chairperson of the health and human services committee, where she focused on areas of children's health and domestic violence.

In 2000, when incumbent West Virginia Representative Bob Wise retired from his congressional seat covering the central swath of the state, including the state capital, to run for governor, Capito challenged former Democratic state senator Jim Humphreys for the vacancy. At one point early in the race, she trailed Humphreys by more than 30 points—in addition to facing a heavy Democratic advantage in the number of registered voters.¹ Humphreys won the support of labor, including the United Mine Workers, but Capito closed the gap with a late infusion of national GOP support and her own extensive political network.

She benefited from family name recognition but insisted on her independence. “There’s a whole myth out there my father is running my life and my campaign and it’s not true. I am a 46-year-old woman. I have an independence of spirit.”² She defeated Humphreys with 49 percent to 46 percent of the vote. In doing so, Capito became only the second woman ever elected from West Virginia and the first Republican Representative elected from the state since 1980. In 2002, Capito again faced Humphreys, prevailing with 60 percent of the vote. She won election to a third term in 2004 by defeating Democrat Erik Wells, 57 to 41 percent.³

When she took her seat in the 107th Congress (2001–2003), Capito received assignments on the Financial Services, the Small Business, and the Transportation and Infrastructure committees. She also served as a vice chairwoman of the Woman’s Caucus.

During her first term, Capito hewed to a legislative agenda that focused on the constituents in her district. In the summer of 2002, as California energy woes and national energy policy were at the forefront of debate, Capito argued for a “smart plan” for energy, emphasizing coal and natural gas deposits in West Virginia. In a House speech, she said that “many of these resources have lain asleep, untapped, due partly to the effect of the overly restrictive regulations that have prevented the extraction, the production and the transportation of these sources of energy . . . I think West Virginia’s abundant resources can be used effectively, can be burned environmentally in a cleaner fashion; and it can give us, I think, a good baseline of the energy production that we so desperately need in this country.”⁴ She also cosponsored the reauthorization of the Appalachian Regional Development Act (ARC), first created in 1965, to boost economic and industrial development in rural Appalachia. “Whether it is building new roads, providing employee training or assisting local communities with flood damage, the ARC has proven itself to be a tremendous asset for West Virginia and the rest of the region,” Capito said while urging her colleagues to reauthorize the bill in 2002.⁵

Her interest in health care and prescription drug legislation led Speaker J. Dennis Hastert of Illinois to appoint Congresswoman Capito vice co-chair of the House Prescription Drug Task Force. She expressed concern about prescription coverage for West Virginia’s large senior population, more than a quarter of whom live below the poverty level. She pressed for catastrophic coverage for expensive drugs and especially called attention to the plight of older, widowed women with no source of income. Additionally, Capito, known for her energy and accessibility, fought hard to preserve West Virginia jobs.

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, “Shelley Moore Capito,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>

NOTES

- 1 Sandra Basu, “Shelley Moore Capito’s Uphill Climb,” May 2001, *Campaigns & Elections*: 22.
- 2 Lawrence Messina, “The Sins of Her Father: Arch Moore Casts Shadow in Daughter’s Congressional Race,” 1 November 2000, *Charleston Gazette*: 1C.
- 3 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.
- 4 *Congressional Record*, House, 107th Cong., 1st sess. (20 June 2001): 3349.
- 5 *Congressional Record*, House, 107th Cong., 2nd sess. (26 February 2002): 529.